

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PC-10 SCS-03 SCA-01 L-03 H-01
DHA-02 A-01 PA-01 PRS-01 USIE-00 SSO-00 CIAE-00
INR-07 NSAE-00 INRE-00 SS-15 SY-05 /061 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8998

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DEPT ALSO PASS PEACE CORPS IMMEDIATE

E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: CASC, PFOR, CT, US

SUBJ: ARREST OF PCV JIM MAHER

REF: BANGUI 1566

1. PCV JIM MAHER STILL BEING HELD BY IMPERIAL SECURITY FORCES. PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR (PCD) DELIVERED FOOD, TOILETRIES AND BEDDING TO PALACE JULY 27 AFTERNOON AND WAS ASSURED THEY WOULD REACH MAHER. PEACE CORPS IS NOW DELIVERING MEALS TO PALACE THREE TIMES A DAY FOR MAHER. CONSULAR OFFICER HAD BRIEF ACCESS TO MAHER JULY 27 AND REPORTS HE IS WELL (SEE BELOW). MINISTER OF HEALTH STILL TRYING TO CONTACT MINISTER OF INTERIOR. PCV'S KEEPING LOW PROFILE BUT BUSINESS AS USUAL. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE EMPEROR IS AWARE OF THE CASE, BELIEVES PCVS SHOULD BE INSTRUCTED TO BE MORE CIRCUMSPECT, BUT APPARENTLY DOES NOT ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE INCIDENT. STILL NO PRESS COVERAGE OF EVENT.

FOR PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON: PLEASE INFORM PCD WHETHER AND HOW YOU HAVE NOTIFIED PCV MAHER'S PARENTS.

2. FOLLOWING IS CONSULAR OFFICER'S REPORT OF MEETING WITH MAHER
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JULY 27:

A. PCV MAHER, ESCORTED BY APPROXIMATELY EIGHT MEMBERS OF THE "SURETE IMPERIAL" WAS TAKEN TO HIS HOTEL ROOM AT 1700 HOURS, 27 JULY TO WITNESS A SEARCH OF ALL HIS PERSONAL POSSESSIONS. BY CHANCE, PCV MIKE ERICSON STOPPED BY THE ROOM AND OBSERVED WHAT WAS GOING ON. THE "SURETE" TOLD ERICSON TO STAY PUT AS THEY

WANTED TO QUESTION HIM LATER. ANOTHER PCV REPORTED THESE DEVELOPMENTS AND THE EMBASSY CONSULAR OFFICER WENT IMMEDIATELY TO THE HOTEL.

B. BY THE TIME THE CONSULAR OFFICER ARRIVED, THE ROOM WAS IN A COMPLETE SHAMBLES, MATTRESS OVERTURNED, MAHER'S POSSESSIONS SCATTERED EVERYWHERE. MAHER SURROUNDED BY "SURETE" OFFICIALS WAS STANDING IN THE CENTER OF THE DEBRIS, HANDCUFFED. THE "SURETE" AT FIRST DENIED PERMISSION TO SPEAK TO MAHER. THEY RELENTED HOWEVER WHEN THE CONSULAR OFFICER SAID HE WOULD LIMIT HIS QUESTIONS TO A COUPLE PERSONAL MATTERS AND WOULD SPEAK IN FRENCH SO ALL WOULD UNDERSTAND.

C. MAHER WAS BRIEFED ON WHAT THE EMBASSY AND PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR WERE DOING TO RESOLVE THE MATTER -- THE RESULT OF AN APPARENT MISUNDERSTANDING -- AND WOULD SECURE HIS RELEASE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONING MAHER SAID HE WAS BEING FED, DID NOT NEED MONEY FOR HIS MEALS OR MEDICATION AND THAT GENERALLY EVERYTHING WAS OK. LATER, WHEN ASKED IN ENGLISH IF HE WAS BEING MISTREATED HE SAID, "NO, BUT...", AND SHRUGGED HIS HEAD. (COMMENT: IN VIEW OF HIS EARLIER COMMENTS, MAHER'S RESERVATION MAY HAVE BEEN PROMPTED BY FACT "SURETE" CUT HIS LONG HAIR AND SHEARED OFF HIS BEARD.)

D. THE "SURETE" SPOKESMAN DENIED PERMISSION FOR THE CONSULAR OFFICER TO SEE MAHER AT A LATER TIME; REFUSED TO SAY WHERE HE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS BEING HELD, (ALTHOUGH WE ARE FAIRLY CERTAIN HE IS BEING DETAINED AT THE DOWNTOWN PALACE); REFUSED TO IDENTIFY THE "SURETE" CHIEF BY NAME TO ENABLE US DIRECT CONTACT; AND BECAME IRRITATED AND REFUSED TO ANSWER WHEN ASKED WHAT IF ANY CHARGES HAD BEEN PLACED AGAINST MAHER AND WHEN HE WOULD BE RELEASED. AFTER ABOUT 15 MINUTES THE "SURETE" SPOKESMAN CUT THE CONSULAR OFFICER OFF AND INDICATED HE SHOULD LEAVE. HE SAID ERICSON SHOULD STAY AS HE "WANTED TO SPEAK TO HIS PCV FRIEND". ERICSON INDICATED TO THE CONSULAR OFFICER HE DID NOT WANT TO STAY AS THE "SURETE" HAD PREVIOUSLY INDICATED THEY WOULD TAKE HIM IN FOR QUESTIONING. THE SPOKESMAN WAS TOLD ERICSON HAD NOTHING TO SAY TO MAHER AND WOULD LEAVE WITH THE CONSULAR OFFICER. AFTER OUR DEPARTURE THE "SURETE" CONTACTED THE PEACE CORPS AND ASKED FOR ERICSON. (COMMENT: ERICSON WAS QUITE SHAKEN UP BY THE INCIDENT AND CONSEQUENTLY PCD AND THE EMBASSY DECIDED IT WOULD BE BEST IF HE MOVED TEMPORARILY TO THE PCD'S HOUSE. WE BELIEVE THE "SURETE" WILL LOSE INTEREST IN ERICSON.) PRIOR TO LEAVING THE CONSULAR OFFICER THANKED ALL THE POLICE FOR THEIR CONSIDERATION AND COOPERATION AND EXPRESSED AN APPRECIATION OF THE FACT THAT THEY WERE MERELY DOING THEIR JOB. WE LATER LEARNED ALL OF MAHER'S POSSESSIONS WERE CARRIED AWAY BY THE "SURETE" AND PRESUMABLY WERE TAKEN TO THE PALACE ALONG WITH MAHER.

SMITH

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